(a) whether his Ministry has set up an expert group to go into the question of granting infrastructure status to the shipping industry.

(b) if so, the time by which the expert group is expected to submit its report; and

(c) the steps which are being taken by his Ministry to help the shipping industry go physically and technologically?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF SURFACE TRANSPORT (DR. DEBENDRA PRADHAN): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) The following proposals have been initiated by this Ministry to help the shipping industry;

(a) Restoration of section 33AC of Income Tax Act;

(b) Enhancement of depreciation from 20% to 40%;

(c) Tax relief to Indian seafarers; and

(d) Coastal shipping must be declared as an infrastructure industry.

Expansion of fleet by SCI

3327. SHRI RAMDAS AGARWAL: Will the Minister of SURFACE TRANSPORT be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Shipping Corporation of India has drawn up a Rs. 567 crore plan for adding another 16 ships to its fleet;

(b) if so, from which source SCI would manage to obtain such a huge amount for acquiring new ships;

(c) whether it is a fact that SCI's plan had suffered during the Ninth Plan and its share in the Indian Shipping tonnage came down from 50 per cent to 43 per cent in the last three years; and

(d) if so, what are SCI's new investment plans for getting a better price for its shares?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF SURFACE TRANSPORT (DR. DEBENDRA PRADHAN): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The SCI has proposed to meet the outlay of Rs. 567 crores from their internal resources (Rs. 113.40 crore) and by raising External Commercial Borrowing (ECB)/Extra Budgetary Resources (EBR) (Rs. 453.60 crores). The SCI have now revised their plan to acquire 14 vessels instead of 16 vessels earlier proposed.

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) The SCI has a plan to acquire/place order for the acquisition of following vessels during 2000-01:—

(i) 5 Aframax Tankers (4 New and 1 Second hand)

(ii) 1 LR-II tanker from Cochin Shipyard Limited (New)

(iii) 3 Tugs (New)

(iv) 1 VLCC (Second hand)

(v) 2 Capesize bulk carriers (New)

(vi) 2 Chemical tankers (New)

Development of Buckingham Canal for inland water transport

3328. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of SURFACE TRANSPORT be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is any proposal under active consideration to develop the Buckingham Canal in Andhra Pradesh for inland water transport;

(b) whether such a proposal has received serious attention from the inland water transport authorities;

(c) if so, the details of the findings;

(d) whether this proposal has been found to be technically feasible;

(e) if so, whether any estimate of the costs involved have been made;

(f) whether any foreign technical assistance has been sought; and

(g) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF SURFACE TRNASPORT (DR. DEBENDRA PRADHAN): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. A Techno-economic feasibility study for development of Kakinada- Mercaunum canal system integrated with Godavari and Krishna rivers has been undertaken.